

Monument Avenue, 2500 Block
Richmond
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1304

HABS
VA,
44-RICH,
129-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MONUMENT AVENUE, 2500 BLOCK

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Location: 2500 block of Monument Avenue, between Davis Avenue and Robinson Street, Richmond, Virginia.

History and Description:

The block west of the Jefferson Davis Monument, Davis Avenue to Robinson Street, is a shorter block than most of those on Monument Avenue, having approximately half the width of an average block. This tract is also unusual because although there are seven structures on the north side, there is just one building on the entire south side of the street. This block developed a bit more slowly than others to the east. The first house on the block was built in 1908 and, with the exception of the vacant southwestern lot, the area was gradually filled in by 1924. All the buildings were designed as residences, either single-family dwellings or apartments.

The impressive Branch House at 2501 Monument Ave. dominates the block and seems as monumental as nearby Jefferson Davis himself. John Kerr Branch selected the south side of the 2500 block for his residence, believing that Monument Avenue would terminate at Davis Avenue where the commemorative statue to Jefferson Davis was erected in 1907. Even the figure of the Confederate president was positioned with its back to westward development and the monument is further enclosed by a colonnade that forms a semicircle at the rear of the memorial. Branch probably thought this terminus on the avenue would ensure a desirable setting for the type of house he wanted to build.¹ Branch occupied only the eastern half of the south side of the 2500 block, presumably reserving the western half for his sister, although she never built on it.

The house, completed in 1919, was originally built as a residence for the John Kerr Branch family, but its 28,000 square feet are at present the offices of the Virginia Agency of Northwest Mutual Life Insurance Company. The scale of the Tudor Revival mass suggests the owner's wealth and status, not unlike an English manor house. In addition to its function as a third and winter residence for the Branch family, the house was designed to provide a suitable setting for entertaining guests, showcasing Branch's extensive art collection, and accommodating a large staff of servants.

John Russell Pope, a nationally prominent architect, designed the building whose estimated cost of construction was \$160,000. The house is U-shaped in plan, with a parapeted, slate-clad gable roof. Castellated bays, two and three stories high, add a picturesque, asymmetrical effect. Decorative elements such as elaborate limestone window and door surrounds, bas-relief decoration, chimney pots, patterned brickwork, and leaded glass demonstrate Pope's attraction to detail. Surrounding the grounds is a solid wall of brick, only periodically interrupted by gates composed of sections of brick wall, mounted on wheels. The fence fulfills a vital role since it anchors the oversized house to its limited suburban landscape and communicates a sense of personal, powerful and private ownership that a pastoral setting might otherwise evoke.

¹Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, National Register Nomination: Branch House (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1983).

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John P. Branch sold the site of this house, the southern side of the 2500 block, to his son John Kerr Branch for \$1 and "fatherly affection" in 1903. Beulah Gould Branch inherited the property from her husband, John Kerr, in 1928. Upon her death, the house went to their daughter, Zayde Branch Rennolds, in 1947. Rennolds sold the property to the United Way of Greater Richmond, over a six-year period, a portion at a time. The first parcel (consisting of 15 percent of the property) was sold in 1954 and the last 19 percent of the property was sold as the sixth parcel in 1959. The present owners, Robert and Janice W. Pogue, bought the house from the United Way in the early 1980s and established a deed of easement with the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission to protect the site.

The seven houses on the north side of the 2500 block are modest in comparison to the Branch House, but maintain continuity with other blocks along the avenue. The Colonial Revival image associated with Monument Avenue houses is repeated on this block at Nos. 2500 and 2516. These brick, two-and-a-half-story houses with classical front porches demonstrate the early developmental years of this block. These were the first built here, spanning 1908-1911, and were situated at both ends of the block. The bilaterally symmetrical house at No. 2500 has a projecting center block portion flanked by wider bays. Bold, double columns at the front of the porch and vertical window mullins are combined with wide limestone lintels, a fat entablature, and broad dormer window to give the house a geometric quality. Designed by Albert Hunt, the residence was built in 1908.

The Colonial Revival house at the opposite end of the block, No. 2516 was designed by D. Wiley Anderson and built in 1911. The outspoken porch emphasizes the entrance of the house by creating a deep, almost cavern-like sheltered area directly in front of the door. A narrow pediment above the door peeks behind a wider pediment supported by fat columns. The original owner was attorney Hill Montague, who purchased his lot on Monument Avenue in 1910 from executors for S. S. Cottrell. Montague lived at 1650 W. Grace before he moved to Monument. His son, Hill Montague, Jr., inherited the property in 1948 and owned the house until 1960.

The house at No. 2504 presents a fresh combination of design features and materials. The hipped, nearly pyramidal roof with a hip-roofed dormer on each side crowns a three-bay facade with asymmetrical entrance. Roman brick of buff hue, limestone decoration surrounding French doors and windows at the upper story, and a terrace with wrought-iron balustrade give this home a sense of formality and elegance. Designed by Asbury and Whitehurst for banker William C. Camp, this house was built in 1914 at an estimated cost of \$12,000. Camp purchased his 34' x 130' lot from William Fletcher Richardson in 1913 when he lived at 2500 Grove Ave. He resided at this address for six years until he moved to 106 N. Mulberry in 1919 and sold his property to lumberman R. E. Richardson and wife, Julia, for \$30,000. Descendants of the Richardsons still retain title to the property today.

There are two multi-family residences on this block, Nos. 2510 and 2512. Although latecomers, these twin apartments were not the last buildings constructed on this block. Built in 1916-17, the verticality of these three-story apartment buildings is emphasized by columned two-story porches that are duplicated at each apartment. Because there is strong vertical emphasis, these apartments interfere with the rhythm established by shorter, two-and-a-half-story neighbors. Nonetheless, their classical appearance is composed of familiar design elements seen on earlier

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houses of Monument, but at a new giant scale. This apartment form of three bays with central entrance flanked by porches is a regular building type of Richmond's Fan District. Variations of the plan occur on later blocks of this district (see the 2900 and 3600 blocks of Monument, for example) and on side streets off the avenue. These 2500-block apartments designed by Albert F. Hunt have squat hipped roofs, accented cornices, and balustraded porches that culminate with Palladian-inspired windows at the third story. The combined estimated construction cost for both apartments was \$70,000.

Oscar Hooker, vice president of Richmond Distilling Company, had these apartments built. Hooker resided at 605 Grace St. when he acquired the lots for Nos. 2510 and 2512 in February 1916. He applied for a building permit three months later. According to the 1918 city directory, Stratford Court Apartments at No. 2512 was the new residence of six tenants: Thaddeus Bell, an agent with New York Life Insurance Company who formerly resided on Franklin Street; A. T. Lowmaster, a superintendent with Chesapeake & Ohio Railway; and Robert Saul and his relatives. Saul was a manager for Hines, Jones & Cadbury, a plumbing supply company, who moved from 1030 W. Franklin apparently with his three daughters, Dorothy, Gladys, and Josephine. The apartment at No. 2512 remained occupied by the Hooker family until 1958.

The 2500 block also has two eclectic houses. Built in 1910-11, **2514 Monument Ave.** is an odd mix of styles, assembled by architects Carneal and Johnston. The familiar Monument Avenue form of two bays wide, two-and-a-half stories high, is executed in red brick with white keystones and a denticulated cornice. The three-story polygonal bay and tracery-work balustrades lend a Jacobean air, however.

The last house constructed on the block is in a vaguely Spanish Colonial style at **No. 2502**. Built in 1924 to designs by Otis K. Asbury, it suggests a change in taste from colonial-inspired designs to an updated European-eclectic architecture. Its style could be a response to the stately villa-like residences built one block up the street eight years earlier, but is probably part of a wider trend followed by fellow homeowners on the 3100 and 3200 blocks of Monument Avenue, as well.

Sources of Information:

Richmond City Directories.

Richmond Building Permits: 3494, 3756 (2504 Monument); 5078 (2510-2512 Monument); 2035 (2516 Monument).

Deed Books: **2501 Monument:** 176C/337, 198B/347, Will Book 28/153, 530D/377, 560D/377, 568A/54, 576D/48, 583B/429, 590B/689, 597A/94, 790/1356, 1420, 804/780; **2500 Monument:** 211C/465, Will Book 2/448, 434C/413, 436B/29, Will Book 95/105, 664A/270, 267, 13/690; **2504 Monument:** Will Book 2/448, 223A/58, 254B/37, Will Book 27/348, Will Book 41/476, Will Book 77/347, 612D/196; **2512 Monument:** Will Book 2/448, 162B/80; 197A/388, 389, Henrico Co. Deed Book 100/285, Henrico Co. Deed Book 99/295, Henrico Co. Deed Book 96/57, 222A/224; 237A/56, 237C/57, 56, 437D/372, 589B/177, 703/1650; **2516 Monument:** 207B/420, 421, Will Book

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71/472, 598A/267, 629C/221, 647D/590, 686D/777, 68/1890, 68/1893, 112/312, 166/130, 182/794.

Virginius Dabney, Richmond: The Story of a City (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1976), opposite 173.

William B. O'Neal, "The Multiple Life of Space," Arts In Virginia 5 (Spring 1965): 2-11.

Project Information:

This documentation of Monument Avenue was undertaken in summer 1991 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, Washington, D.C., under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project was sponsored by the Monument Avenue Centennial Committee, Millie Jones and Ceci Amrhein, co-chairpersons, and Sylvia Summers, director of development. Funding was provided by the Historic Monument Avenue and Fan District Foundation, the City of Richmond, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, the Historic Richmond Foundation, the F. M. Kirby Foundation, Inc., and the Robert G. Cabell III and Maude Morgan Cabell Foundation.

HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland directed the project and edited this historical report. Kathy Edwards (University of California at Berkeley) was the field supervisor; Esme Howard (Yale University) and Toni Prawl (University of Missouri) were the team historians. Jonathan C. Spodek, AIA, produced architectural drawings and Jack Boucher took the photographs. The team's work resulted in the publication Monument Avenue, of which the report on this one block forms only a small portion. Researchers are referred to that volume for more information.

ADDENDUM TO:
2500 BLOCK MONUMENT AVENUE
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